

90-ton locomotive still comin' to Utah

By Jan Padfield

Deseret News staff writer

HEBER CITY — A runaway steam locomotive rolling down Highway #666 is an awesome sight. "I looked back and it was coming right at me, cutting its own track," the driver of a tractor trailer unit said.

The 90-ton engine, en route from St. Johns, Ariz. to Heber City, broke through the trailer on which it was mounted, snapped the chains securing it, and took off down the highway. The man in the cab said; "I felt like I'd been shot out of a cannon when that thing broke loose!"

Lowe Ashton, president of the Wasatch Mountain Scenic Railway (the "Heber Creeper") is the new owner of the runaway. He wonders if he'll ever see the promised antique. "I vowed I'd be here waiting, if it took them until Christmas to get it here. But I've decided now to get in my motor home and go out looking for it. The way I have it figured, they'll be just about in the middle of the Navajo Indian Reservation tonight. I think I'd better go see what's going on."

The story, which reads like an old movie script, began last July when the former owner of a scenic railroad in McNary, Ariz., decided he couldn't take the "hassle" any longer.

He had been involved in court action

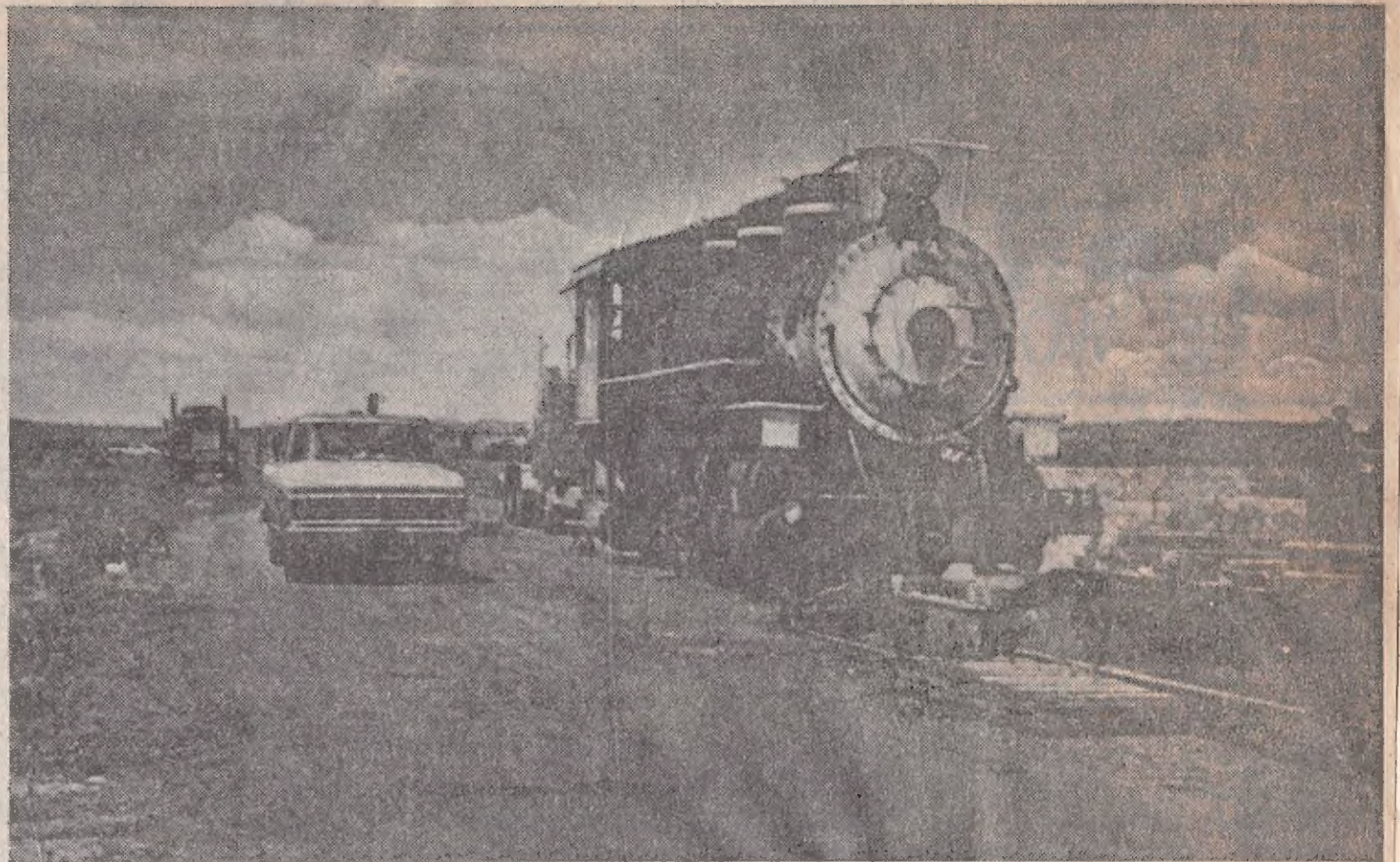
concerning the right of way of the railroad which went through the Apache Indian Reservation. He offered Ashton the engine, plus another 80-ton "beauty, both in perfect condition," according to Ashton.

"I told him I would love to have them, but couldn't afford them. But he said we'd talk about that later, he wanted to get them where they wouldn't be vandalized. We were really pleased to get them, since we'd been experiencing problems with some of ours on the Heber Creeper," he said.

"We thought about moving them ourselves, but thought we'd better leave it to the professionals. We knew one company had moved a 110-ton engine through Utah, and contacted them, but our engine's peculiar wheel arrangement didn't fit their trailers," he added.

The J. B. Rose Co., Houston, said they could do it, so we made the arrangements. They mapped out the route with the Arizona Highway Dept., got it loaded and started out, "Ashton related. They got to a crossing and the rain began, washing out the bridge. It rained for ten days straight. They sent to headquarters for a portable bridge. Out of patience, they then had mechanical problems.

"The president of the company came to personally direct the operation. I was told he said he would get the engines to Heber City if it took a million



A 90-ton locomotive sits on road near St. Johns, Ariz., after a trailer on which it was riding collapsed.

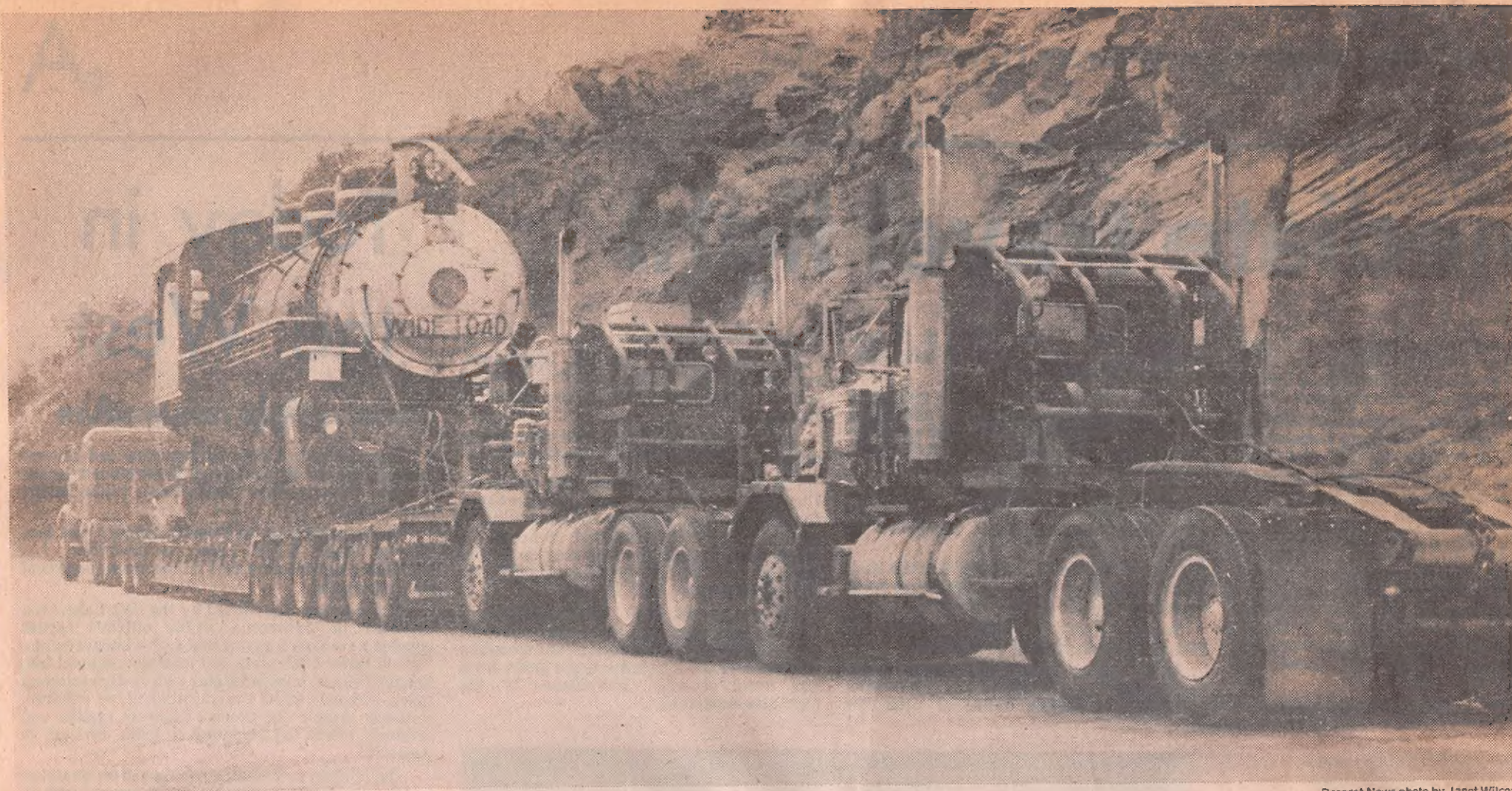
dollars," Ashton said.

The company put the locomotives on 125-foot trailers, with tractors pulling each, with a man on the end of each trailer to guide. Two more trucks are accompanying them to push and pull over steep grades, plus a vehicle at each end carrying "wide load" signs.

"They've assured me there's no

major damage, but when the man called me to tell me it had run away," he either had a heavy Texas accent, or he was crying," Ashton said.

"The caravan moves about 60 miles a day . . . when they move," said Ashton.



Deseret News photo by Janet Wilcox

Keep on tracking

Locomotion isn't easy when the hills are steep and train tracks are nowhere to be seen. In this case, two diesel tractor trucks are necessary to provide an extra boost as a third tractor with a trailer hauling a 90-ton locomotive chugs up the steep incline in

Devil's Canyon north of Blanding, San Juan County, Friday afternoon. The engine and the trucks are part of a seven truck convoy slowly bringing two antique engines from St. Johns, Ariz., to Heber City. The J.H. Rose Trucking Co., Houston, Texas, took on the

heavy-duty job for the Wasatch Mountain Scenic Railway, which operates the Heber Creeper in Provo Canyon. At one point near the journey's beginning, the engine above slipped from the trailer when the binding chains snapped.

Engine Hauled From Arizona

Moving a train across country is no big deal ... unless there are no railroad tracks.

The job of loading a massive engine aboard a flatbed trailer and hauling it hundreds of miles across the desert, up mountains, and through winding canyons can be fraught with frustrations and danger.

At the end of July two huge locomotives began a truck ride from McNary, Ariz., bound for Heber City and service in the Heber Creeper Scenic line.

Yesterday half of the engines arrived in Wasatch County and the other is expected sometime next week. — barring more unforeseen difficulties.

Workers of the Wasatch Scenic Railway today were unloading the lighter of the two engines — this one just 70 tons. The heavier engine a 90-ton worker is waiting in Green River, for repairs on the trailer being used to carry the giant burden.

The two engines are being hauled by J. H. Rose Truck Lines of Houston, Tex., and it has been no picnic for the men involved.

The heavy engine — designated as No. 100 — was riding along when the hitch broke. The trailer was slammed against the highway and the tractor naturally pulled away free from its load. Then chains broke and the locomotive began to move on its own.

The driver looked in the mirror and instead of seeing the trailer and its burden waiting for him — all he could see was this 90-ton beast chasing him down the highway.

The 70-ton engine was built at the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Eddystone Penn., in 1926. It was used by the Santa Maria Valley Railway in California.

Since it was used mostly to haul produce to market the men who worked with her lovingly called her the "Cabbage Hauler."

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FINALLY ARRIVING in Heber City is this 70-ton locomotive which will be used as one of two new engines on the Heber Creeper scenic run next year. Coming all the way from McNary, Ariz., the steam

engine had been used on the White Mountain Scenic Railway line. The trek began about a month ago.
(Photo by Dennis Patterson)

